

Socialism on the Periphery of Global Capitalism

Written by Caio Bugiato

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CAIO BUGIATO, NOV 6 2020

The road to overcoming the capitalist mode of production was indicated by the founders of modern socialism, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. This road is constructed in the political practice of the struggle between social classes, which has particularities in each country and, therefore, is not a pre-made model to be implemented. It is a road that should be guided by a theoretical framework that does not consist of a mere abstract lucubration but in a dialectical relationship between real and concrete thought. In this sense, we find in the Marxian thought the basis of the critical theory of the functioning of capitalism and the elements for its overcoming. Three of these deserve to be highlighted: 1) the resolution of the contradiction between productive forces and relations of production; 2) the conquest of political power for the socialist transition; and 3) the disappearance of the social classes and the State as we know them today, that is, the advent of communist society or the communist mode of production.

We find the first element in the *Communist Manifesto*. Marx and Engels (2009) put on the agenda of change in the relations of production and the type of State, that is, the revolutionary transformation of society. The friends of letters and struggles present the establishment of the contradiction between the development of the productive forces and the current relations of production as the element that generates a systemic imbalance. This imbalance would be up to the class struggle to resolve. The era of social revolution is one in which the development of the productive forces is garbled, and no longer stimulated, by the existing relations of production. And the social classes, as organized and struggling collectives, represent on the one hand the “outdated” relations of production, fighting for the preservation of the current social structure (the bourgeoisie) and, on the other hand, another class represents the rising productive forces, fighting for historical change (the proletariat) – in this case, from capitalism to socialism. It is therefore not a question of any economic or political conflict, but a particular confrontation at a well-defined stage in the historical process, a period of revolution.

The second element is found in *The Civil War in France*. When analyzing the experience of the 1971 Paris commune, Marx (2013) indicates that the seizure of political power, of the state, is the essential beginning of the socialist transition process. In exercising a barrier to the private control of the means of production, a new form of political organization (new non-capitalist state) is characterized by a mass popular democracy, socialization of political power, capable of initiating the process of socialization of the means of production: unified democratic planning in the center and workers’ management in basic production. The suppression of private property and the collective control of the direct producer over the means of production drives the development of the productive forces, put by the new state at the service of collective well-being and not of private profit.

The third element is in the *Critique of the Gotha Program*. Marx (2012) distinguishes two phases of communist society. The first, the socialist transition, immediately follows capitalism, but it bears marks of its origin, such as bourgeois ideas and values and ways of exploiting labor. In this, the proletariat conquers the power of the state and becomes the new ruling class, establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat (on the one hand the use of state strength against the bourgeoisie and the counter-revolution, on the other the mass popular democracy). In order to protect itself from its enemies, it is necessary to build a new society with another form of political organization and a new economy based on the development of productive forces free from the bonds of capitalist property. Society then enters a higher stage, communism, in which the class antagonism (bourgeois versus the proletariat) disappears completely. And the state, no longer necessary to protect the property and exploitation of workers, withers and gives way to another form of political organization never seen in the history of mankind (this is true for the experiences of

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the 20th and 21st centuries).

These elements were present in a latent, manifest, and/or the programmatic way in the political forces, that fought for a socialist transition in the 20th century, given the world expansion and the uneven and combined development of capitalism. According to the study by Visentini et. al. (2013), we may argue that these socialist experiences, varied and with their peculiarities, were initiated by the Mexican Revolution of 1910 or even by the Russian Revolution of 1905, although redirected or defeated in a short period. Indeed, it was the Russian Revolution of 1917 that provided the revolutionary wave of the century: in the countries that composed the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics after the revolution in Russia in October 1917; in Eastern Europe between World War I and II, forming Popular Democracies; in China and North Korea after World War II; in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos in the 1970s; in Angola, Mozambique and Ethiopia also in the 1970s; in Cuba in 1959 and Nicaragua in 1979; in Yemen in 1967 and Afghanistan in 1978; etc. Unlike the indications of socialism theorists, revolutions did not occur in the central capitalist countries, where the productive forces are more developed, production relations are based on wage labor, the political system consists of bourgeois democracy, and the proletariat would be more politically organized to the point of driving a transition. They took place on the periphery of the international system and then took on different characters and consequences to overcome capitalism: democratic, democratic-popular, national liberation, anti-imperialist and anti-feudal (usually combining more than one of these characters).

However, these experiences had common characteristics such as: central economic planning to the detriment of the free market with nationalization of large companies and collective ownership of the means of production (this is how Soviet Russia ceased to be a semi-feudal social formation and reached position of economic and military power in the first half of the 20th century, a period in which it only had peace between 1928 and 1941); state policies for the gradual elimination of inequalities and the universalization of public services such as health, education, transportation, housing, leisure, and other social objectives that the liberal West set out to achieve but did not and will not do under the aegis of the neoliberal program that governs capitalist countries; political centralization, whose command sought to defend the conquests of the revolution against attacks by domestic and foreign counterrevolutionary forces and organized a system distinct from bourgeois democracy, with other forms of participation and opposition; and at the international level, the various types of interventions and sanctions suffered by these countries from mainly Washington (the CIA specialized in this) with the aim of defeating them, obstructing their experiences and / or isolating them, which led them to the orbit of Soviet Russia, as it was the state that could best face such attacks, providing military supply, legitimation, political and economic support.

In particular, the USSR had a distinctive role in the construction of socialism both in its territory and in progressive processes around the world, such as the welfare state in Europe and national-developmentalism in Latin America. The Russian evolution, above all, and other socialist experiences threatened capitalism – so it had become more civilized or less barbarian – and implemented or influenced other countries to make policies such as: universalization of political rights, generalization of political systems with the incorporation of “minorities” and liquidation of census vote; valuing women and gender equality; creation of social security systems and valorization of work with the right of workers to organize to effect and defend achievements; smoothing out the greed of the bourgeoisie and the possibility of building welfare societies; adoption of a central economic planning mechanism, favoring industrialization and technological development with the incorporation of the popular mass and the right of enjoyment; defeat or attack on cultural supremacy and Eurocentric racism and criticism of colonialism and imperialism; it defeated fascism, changed the rules in international relations, fostered national liberation movements and anti-colonial revolutions and thus proposed equality between peoples and international cooperation; etc. In the USSR, there were wrong economic calculations for the construction of socialism, periods of political intolerance, and deleterious participation in various areas of international capitalist competition. However, the capitalist forces that attacked it daily, internally and externally, defeated it. It was its successes mentioned above, and not its failure, that gave rise to economic, political, and ideological aggressions and thus led it to close the first cycle of socialist experiences and leave an open road for the socialist transition.

Despite the defeat of the USSR and the end of the first cycle, China took a different road than the Soviets, the West did not defeat it, and it seems to open a second cycle. Chinese Marxists like Jiang Hui (2017, 2019) indicate that socialism with Chinese characteristics has become the flag of the world socialist transition and the 21st century is a

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period of competition between US-led global capitalism and world socialism. This is led by a previous peripheral country that today is a great power. After a period of state capitalism and enormous development of the productive forces, China seems to be in a primary stage of the socialist transition, in which – as Marx points out – elements of capitalism remain and the struggle to overcome them is even more intense, internally and externally. However, the tendency for a socialist country to occupy the top position in the world economy for the first time in history has become concrete. In this sense, other trends in China have characterized their experience in the construction of world socialism – which, according to the Chinese themselves, can only be global or it will not be. They propose the development and independence of the performance of socialist forces (currently weak and dispersed) in all countries to chart their road, connected to regional or international coordination and integration to unify actions, basic theoretical understandings, and objectives of socialism.

However, without the rigid command model of the Third International. Then World socialism combines national characteristics in the nation-state form with cosmopolitanism. In other words, they revive proletarian internationalism and the *Weltgeschichte* (World History) by Marx and Engels. In this way, it is even possible to face the attacks by international capitalist / fascist forces. They support the connection of socialist forces around the world with progressive social movements, such as anti-globalization, democratic rights, pacifists, ecological issues, feminism, etc. to establish great anti-capitalist forces to demolish the current social order and build a new one. They highlight a socialist movement that takes into account economic and social development with ecological responsibility, following the notes of the founders of modern socialism, as in *Capital* (Marx 2008) about the environmental destruction caused by capitalist accumulation.

The Chinese are convinced that the socialist road is multifaceted by national experiences, consists of advances and setbacks and victories and defeats, it is a process whose worldwide reach is vital for its existence, and above all, it is arduous and lengthy. Furthermore, according to Xi Jinping (2016), China has a fundamental role in it, since socialism with Chinese characteristics allowed scientific socialism to show renewed vigor in the 21st century. In addition, to follow a highly realistic, viable, and correct road that captivates the world with its conquests.

In sum, first Marx and Engels theoretically and scientifically paved the road to socialism and fought for it. Then, the USSR inaugurated it in practice and closed a first cycle that left a legacy for future generations. Now China, a survivor of the first cycle, is learning from past mistakes and successes to move towards world socialism. It is necessary to emphasize that the idea of cycles is only a didactic way of looking at the development of socialism worldwide. Then, not necessarily in cycles, as long as there is a socialist perspective, whether in poor Bolivia or giant China, the possibility for humanity to leave its prehistory is always real.

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